

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 086 024

FL 004 941

AUTHOR Palmer, Joe Darwin
 TITLE The Language Policy Course and Language Ecology.
 PUB DATE 12 May 73
 NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (7th, San Juan, Puerto Rico, May 12, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
 DESCRIPTORS *Area Studies; Community Attitudes; Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Environment; Cultural Interrelationships; Developing Nations; Dialect Studies; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; Language Classification; *Language Planning; Language Research; Language Role; Language Standardization; *Language Typology; Policy Formation; Psycholinguistics; *Sociolinguistics; Written Language

ABSTRACT

A new and important part of the training and education of English as a second language teachers is the course in "Language Policy," which centers on the relationship between politics and language teaching in developing countries, i.e., on language planning. A better understanding and more knowledge might be had by including static and declining countries and areas and by the study of special fields which can be called the parameters of "language ecology." The ecology of a language would comprise, in addition to an assessment of institutional support, facts about its classification, speakers, domains of use, internal varieties, written traditions, standardization, and the attitudes of its users toward it and concurrent languages. Such ecological typology would necessitate the study of language policy and linguistics, demography, sociology, dialectology, philology, prescriptivism, lexicography, ethnolinguistics, and dialinguistics. We need to search for basic principles and concepts of these studies which can be used to arm the English teacher against ignorance, particularly since personality can hardly be separated from language--the key to culture and to learning. (Author)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRO-
DUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM
THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGIN-
ATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT
OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

THE LANGUAGE POLICY COURSE AND LANGUAGE ECOLOGY

Joe Darwin Palmer

The University of Michigan - Dearborn

There are a thousand ways of talking and
words don't help if the spirit is absent.

-- Henry Miller, The Colossus of Maroussi

As language teachers we must try our best to keep alive the spirit that enables us to talk with our students. This spirit no doubt is our ability to promote learning, the goal of teaching. One teaches of necessity and one learns of necessity, but the one activity does not necessarily flow from the other unless the teacher has the ability to organize the content of the material he is teaching. He must organize the lessons, Stevick has pointed out, so that their social and topical dimensions lead to occasions the students find useful, specific, stimulating and open ended (Stevick 1971, p. 54).

One of the greatest problems facing a foreign language teacher is that he and his students often have nothing to say to each other. We have on occasion observed futile and even harmful classroom exercises weakened even further by the teacher's inability to relate the lesson to the when and how of language use, that is, to animate it, to give it spirit, in spite of his training as a foreign-language teacher. A fool with tools is still a fool, even though he

ED 086024

FL 004941

has taken the course in foreign language teaching methods, has been exposed to analysis of the native and target language, and has acquired a general education. If the teacher and his students have nothing to say to each other, we can be sure that the students will not learn anything to say to anyone else. In such a situation we cannot blame the students for reticence. They are usually so respectful of the teacher that they dare not intrude. Furthermore, their first goal in the course is probably a good final grade instead of language competence. So the responsibility for having something to say to the students falls on the shoulders of the teacher. And how is he to have something to say?

I suggest that an answer to this question may be implicit in a common observation: A teacher is more effective during his second year on the job than he is during the first year, and consequently we expect an experienced teacher to do a better job than a beginner. That is to say, everything else being equal, with experience a teacher acquires an understanding of his students that is informed by his knowledge of the groups to which they belong. One might say that the teacher's effectiveness is proportional to how well he understands his students' culture, in the broadest sense.

But culture is not quite the right word. Many well-educated native speakers of English with years of foreign residence and strong foreign acculturation become weak and fumbling foreign language teachers when they are pressed into service, mostly because, I think, they are ignorant about language. Given in-service training in foreign language methodology, they improve somewhat as teachers, yet they cling to false ideas about language -- their own and their students'. Like the laymen that they are, they perpetuate folk attitudes toward language and society and the individual. It is often not knowledge of culture that they lack;

it is knowledge of the place of their students' language in determining and reflecting culture. Likewise, they do not understand the "systematic covariance of linguistic structure and social structure" which sociolinguistics tries to demonstrate (Bright, 1966).

In his Sociolinguistics Bright shows the dimensions of the sociologists' concern with language: 1) the existence of class dialects as they reflect social stratification, 2) special linguistic forms which show respect or the lack of it, 3) the settings and contexts of certain styles, 4) the relation between synchronic and diachronic language study, 5) folk linguistics, 6) the extent of diversity of languages within a group, and 7) how language policy is applied in social planning, in education and public administration.

Now all this material is the same subject matter that is studied, with different particular interests and approaches, under the names ethnolinguistics, linguistic anthropology, sociology of language, language change, bilingualism, language variability, language contact, language standardization, and even to some extent psycholinguistics. And it is exactly knowledge of this sort that the well-trained and well-aculturated teacher of a foreign language needs to have at his command in order to be able to adapt his teaching materials in such a way that his lessons will become useful, specific, stimulating and open-ended.

This is a large claim I'm making and a pretentious one. It seems to promise much that will be difficult to deliver. It is also rather vague in that it lacks a focus of definition and attention, but I would suggest that it is in these areas that we need research, experimentation, and controlled studies. The several names of fields of study subsumed under the rubric sociolinguistics suggest kinds of knowledge which are probably outside the purview of most language teachers and impossible of attainment, given the small amount of time we have in

which to train them. Yet the feeling that this is what a teacher ought to know persists.

That a knowledge of politics and society is necessary to successful foreign language teaching is suggested by Cripwell in his article "English as a Communication Skill: Implications for Teacher Training" (1972). He says that

The two main causes of failure are that too little attention is paid first to the demands made on the school system, and secondly to the political, social, and economic setting of the educational system.

The implication is quite clear: those who are concerned with language acquisition ought to be aware of all the social factors which affect the teaching, learning, and use of the language.

One successful approach to the problem is a course in language policy in which students prepare studies of institutional support for the teaching of languages. Such an elective course in language policy has been offered to EFL teachers at the University of California at Los Angeles, the American University in Cairo, Egypt, and at The University of Michigan. This course has generally been concerned with the relationship between language use and the formulation and implementation of official and de facto political, educational, religious, economic, and artistic attitudes toward languages, especially in developing countries.

In one case the aims of the course have included helping the teacher view his "professional skills within a social and educational framework broader than that of the classroom," and to consider the place of English in language policy vis-a-vis national and official vernaculars and second languages, and their relation to education and official policies, and the consequences of colonialism (Gorman, 1972).

These aims show that the course is organized around politics and language,

or glottopolitics, if one prefers synthetic words. Politics is one of the legs of the tripod called social science, the other two being sociology and anthropology. As such, politics is a pertinent and topical study which leads the student into sociological and anthropological concerns, since none of these studies makes much sense without the other two.

When I spoke to members of Professor Prator's class in language policy at the American University in Cairo in 1972 on language policy in Thailand, I was amazed at the great wealth of material on this topic, and I was chagrined at my lack of ability to organize it adequately. I realized first of all that everything I was to say depended in some basic way on the audience having a knowledge of the physical and political geography of Southeast Asia, something I could not assume. Then I saw that the demography of Southeast Asia is so complex that I did not really begin to understand it myself, even after two years' residence in the area. How could I possibly give the students an understanding of the complex, patternless facts I wanted to get across? With the help of maps and an indulgent audience I spoke for an hour on the topic. At the end of the session I realized that I could go on talking for many hours and not exhaust the subject, for I had no conceptual framework in which to capture the generalizations I was making about the facts I was presenting. I was fortunate at having at hand Richard Noss' Language Policy, Higher Education and Development in Southeast Asia (1967), a truly stunning work and a model of its kind. But I felt that the facts it contains were beyond the understanding of an unsophisticated audience, including myself. And so I began to think about the sort of concepts which could inform one's knowledge of sociolinguistics insofar as this knowledge would make one a better teacher of language.

In surveying the literature of sociolinguistics and language planning I came across Einar Haugen's The Ecology of Language (1972), a collection of essays selected and introduced by Anwar S. Dil, and there in the title essay I found a rationale which seems to promise a way into the complex situation that every modern language is in. Haugen calls "the study of any given language and its environment" the ecology of the language. This environment is in part the society that uses the language, but part of its environment is in the minds of its users, so the ecology is part psychological and part sociological in that the language interacts with other languages in the minds of its speakers and it interacts with society when it is used for communication.

There are several metaphors that serve to define the elusive kind of behavior we call language, among which are the biological, the instrumental, and the structural metaphors. Languages do have structural form, as does the Eiffel Tower, they are used instrumentally as tools, and, most importantly, they have life and purpose, that is to say, the live in some sense. This biological metaphor, it seems to me, offers the best way of seeing a language in its true state. And to understand a living thing necessitates a study of its ecology. As Alan Watts has observed:

"...every scientific discipline for the study of living organisms . . . must, from its own special standpoint, develop a science of ecology -- literally "the logic of the household" -- or the study of organism/environment fields. (Watts, p. 84)

But Haugen has shown that the environment of language is two-fold. It is both the minds of its users and the society in which they use it. And Watts supports this observation:

We think in terms of languages and images we didn't invent . . .
We copy emotional reactions. . . We do not exist apart from
society [which is] . . . our extended mind and body. (Watts, p. 63)

So how do we discover the environment, that is to say, the ecology of language? For any language, we answer these ten questions.

1. What is its classification? What is its relation to other languages? These questions are answered by historical and descriptive linguistics.

2. Who are its users? This is a question for linguistic demography to answer as it defines the geography, locale, religion and social classes of its users.

3. What are its domains of use? Properly a question for sociolinguistics, it has to do with the extent of use of the language, socially and geographically.

4. What are the concurrent languages? That is to say, what other languages might its speakers know or be in contact with? Is diglossia an expected feature?

5. What are the internal varieties of the language? What are the regional dialects of the language? To what extent do social registers or styles reflect a knowledge of the language?

6. What are the written traditions? Is the language a part of a larger culture? Do philology and religion play a part in determining what is acceptable?

7. To what extent is the language standardized? Does prescriptive linguistics support traditionally correct forms? Has the language been codified and unified in any way?

8. What institutional support does the language have? Do government, education, business and general culture give it a definite place?

9. What are the attitudes of the users of the language toward it? To what extent does it reflect the intimacy or status of its users? How does it inform the user's personality?

10. Where does the language stand and where is it going in comparison with other languages of the world and those languages which its users come into contact with? That is, where would you place the language in a typology of ecological classification?

These ten concepts can be listed for convenience as follows:

1. Classification
2. Users
3. Domains of Use
4. Concurrent Languages
5. Internal Varieties
6. Written Traditions
7. Standardization
8. Institutional Support
9. Users' Attitudes
- 10/ Typology of Ecological Classification

Using this framework it is possible to ask and answer many pertinent questions about the languages involved in the school situation. I would like to point out briefly a few directions such inquiries can take, and point out some of the interconnections among various studies which can be included in language ecology.

1. Classification. William Gage's "The African Language Picture" presents ten language zones which are overlaid to some extent by two *linguae francae* -- Swahili and Arabic. This study rests on historical and descriptive studies of the languages of Africa and their classification in language families. This is the sort of information which ought to be available for every language in the world. The Voegelins' Languages of the World . . . (1964) promises to provide such information.

2. Users. Linguistic demography is a branch of geography, many studies of which are generally available for various parts of the world. The point here is that locating the users of the language and defining them by social class and religion

is best got at by the study of demography.

3. Domains of Use. This is the province of sociology proper as it uses language as a defining factor in studies of society. For example, a language can sometimes be shown to be a restricted code, such as *Switzerdutsch*, *Cairene*, or *Yiddish*, or the opposite, a *lingua franca*.

4. Concurrent Languages. The study of bilingualism has informed much of our knowledge of psycholinguistics. Stewart typed languages as 1) standard, 2) classical, 3) artificial, 4) vernacular, 5) dialect, 6) creole, and 7) pidgin (Stewart, 1968). Haugen offered further useful concepts such as importation, substitution, contactual dialect, learner's dialect, and linguistic accommodation; and a study of bilingualism in which the second language is seen as supplementary, complementary, or replacive (Haugen, 1971). I would suggest that Selinker's recent notion of interlanguage, the language acquirer's own personal variety of the second language, neatly intersects certain concepts of bilingualism and leads through the idea of fossilization to psycholinguistics (Selinker, 1972).

5. Internal Varieties. Information on regional varieties is available for many languages, but the study of registers and styles has only begun.

6. Written Traditions. The extent to which the speakers of a language use it in sharing part of a larger culture depends to a great degree on whether the language is not written at all, is normally written, or is used in the physical sciences (Ferguson, 1962). The use of the language in literature and written communication -- newspapers, textbooks, and magazines -- reflects its readers' sophistication as regards their participation in national and regional culture.

7. Standardization. Most languages are not written and are not standardized, for the unification and codification of a language depend as do the written traditions on the place of the language in a larger culture, or on a government's

attempts to impose standards by way of unifying the people politically and socially. Ray's Language Standardization (1960) is the basic work in this field.

8. Institutional Support. At this point we return to our starting point in language policy. Some language policy problems are caused by misconceptions about particular languages, relationships among languages, and relationships between languages and culture (Noss, 1971). Indeed, in the language problems of newly independent states, the cultural questions are the most fundamental (LePage, 1964). Case studies and analyses of such questions can be found in Rubin and Jernudd (1971), in Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta (1968), and in Rice (1962). Some practical effects of language policies around the world can be found in Kaplan's report on the ELS Teacher Education Program (1971).

9. Users' Attitudes. People's attitudes toward each other are closely reflected by their language, as we know through studies such as Labov's (1968) of stratification. They use special forms under certain conditions -- for example, Javanese and Thai forms of respect -- and certain styles for certain people -- for example, Nootka has special styles for kids, dwarfs, hunchbacks, the one-eyed, and the uncircumcized (Bright, 1966). Factors of language use such as status and intimacy help define users' attitudes (Brown and Gilman, 1960). Recently Keenan (1971) has suggested the importance of status among several factors of presupposition in linguistic semantics. He contends that

Many sentences require that certain culturally defined conditions or contexts be satisfied in order for an utterance to be understood. . . . These conditions are naturally called presuppositions of the sentence. They are

- a. status and kind of relations among the participants
- b. age, sex, and generation relations among the participants
- c. status, kin, age, sex, and generation relation's between participants and individuals mentioned in the sentence . . .

[this list is incomplete here]

Thus a knowledge of ethnology, how the individual regards himself and others, may be essential in theoretical linguistics, just as it surely is essential in the ecology of a language.

10 Typology of Ecological Classification. In order to type a language, all of the previous nine concepts must be applied to the language in question. The resulting information may be used to give intellectual substance to the studies we are calling sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

In summary, the ecology of language offers a set of concepts and questions about the environment of a language, both social and psychological, such that answers to the questions and illustrations of the concepts give us knowledge about the users of the language which can be used to inform those decisions of language policy on which we may have some influence as teachers and administrators, and to inform our own teaching of English, that we may do it better.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

- Bright, William, (also ed.) "Introduction: The Dimensions of Sociolinguistics," in Sociolinguistics, Mouton, 1966.
- Brown, Roger, and Albert Gilman, 1960, "The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity," in Sebeok, T. A. (ed.) Style in Language, New York, The Technology Press, pp. 253-276, also in Fishman 1968.
- Cripwell, Kenneth R., "English as a Communication Skill: Implications for Teacher Training," Teacher Education in New Countries, London, 12, 3 (1972, 282-90).
- Ferguson, Charles A. "The Language Factor in National Development," in Rice 1962.

- Fishman, Ferguson, and Das Gupta (eds.) Language Problems of Developing Nations, New York, John Wiley and Sons, 1968.
- Gage, William W. "The African Language Picture" Linguistic Reporter, Washington, D. C. 13, 3 (1971) 15-27.
- Gorman, Thomas, "Syllabus for English 270K, Language Policy in Developing Countries" mimeographed, UCLA, Winter 1972.
- Haugen, Einar, "The Ecology of Language" in The Ecology of Language: Essays by Einar Haugen, selected by Anwar Dil, Stanford University Press, 1972, also in The Linguistic Reporter, Supplement 25, Winter, 1971, pp. 19-26 as "The Ecology of Language."
- Kaplan, Robert B. A Follow-up Evaluation and a model of Utilization of the ELS Teacher Education Program, University of Southern California, 1971.
- Keenan, Edward L., "Two Kinds of Presupposition in Natural Language" in Fillmore and Langendoen (eds.) Studies in Linguistic Semantics, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, pp. 45-52.
- Labov, William, "The Reflection of Social Processes in Linguistic Structures," in Fishman, J. A., Readings in the Sociology of Language, Mouton, 1967, pp. 240-251.
- LePage, R. B. The National Language Question: Linguistic Problems of Newly Independent States, Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Noss, Richard, "Language Policy, Higher Education and Development in Southeast Asia, Vol. III, Pt. 2, UNESCO and International Association of Universities, Paris, 1967.
- Noss, Richard, "Politics and Language Policy in Southeast Asia," Language Sciences, no. 16., August, 1971.
- Stevick, Earl W., Adapting and Writing Language Lessons, Foreign Service Institute, Washington, D. C. 1971.
- Ray, Punya Sloka, Language Standardization (Studies in Prescriptive Linguistics) Mouton, 1960.
- Rice, Frank A. (ed.) Study of the Role of Second Languages in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, Washington, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1962.
- Rubin, Joan, and Bjorn Jernudd, Can Language Be Planned?: Sociolinguistic Theory and Practice for Developing Nations, East-West Center, University of Hawaii, 1971.

Selinker, Larry, "Interlanguage," IRAL X/3 (1972) August, pp. 209-31.

Stewart, William, "Creole Languages in the Caribbean," in Rice 1962, pp. 34-53.

Voegelin, C. F. and F. M., Languages of the World: Native American Fascicle One, Anthropological Linguistics 6. 6. 2-45.

Watts, Alan, The Book: on the Taboo against Knowing who You Are, Vintage, Random House, 1972.